

ON Tuesday Princess Beatrix, the Crown Princess of the Netherlands, celebrates her eighteenth birthday and, by doing so, comes constitutionally of age. She will be entitled to her own State income; and, more than this, she becomes a member of the Council of State and could, if need be, act as Regent in Queen Juliana's absence.

Princess Beatrix is still a pupil at the lycée at Baarn, near the Royal Palace of



PRINCESS BEATRIX

Soestdijk, but before long she will follow in her mother's footsteps and go to study law at the University of Leiden. She has already displayed, I hear, a considerable gift for organisation; in this, as much as in her high spirits and natural sociability, she follows the example set by her mother and grandmother.

Begging the Question

NEW Ministers generally get their baptism of fire during Question Time, and if all goes according to schedule Mr. Aubrey Jones, the Minister of Fuel and Power, should face this ordeal in the House of Commons tomorrow afternoon.

During his six years as a Member of Parliament Mr. Jones has not asked a single question. Very few men are promoted to Ministerial rank

directly from the back benches, and very few Members completely ignore Question Time.

Mr. Jones's aversion to questions springs from a dinner that the Speaker gave for the Queen, then Princess Elizabeth, in 1950, soon after Aubrey Jones was first elected to the House. He was sitting next to Sir Frederick Metcalfe, who was the Clerk of the House of Commons. Sir Frederick asked his companion why he had not come forward with any questions. Mr. Jones replied that he felt overawed by the procedure.

"I wouldn't bother with it," Sir Frederick remarked. "Lloyd George and Winston Churchill never asked questions when they got into the House." His advice has now been vindicated.

The Writers' Friend

IT was fortunate for the British film industry that Sir Alexander Korda did not decide, in the April of his career, to consolidate his position in France. With his talent for friendship and his love of good food and good talk, he might well have remained there; and the ever-enjoyable "Marius" series is still with us to show what he could have achieved.

But, just as in France he won the affection of René Clair, Raimu and Marcel Pagnol, so in England writers like A. E. W. Mason, H. G. Wells and Graham Greene were quick to recognise him as a natural ally. Not only in the famous successes of his twenty-six years in this country, but also in a number of noble near-failures, he expressed his personal and eminently seigniorial idea of what a good film should be.

Inspired Romantic

Korda was the most consummate of individualists. In "Rembrandt" he transposed the feeling for paint that made him one of our shrewdest col-

lectors. "The Four Feathers" and "The Drum" were steeped in his romantic admiration for British imperial tradition—and they betrayed, too, a feeling for fine horsemanship that may have come from the unending plains of his native Hungary. Even in "Lady Hamilton" there could be felt the glow of an ardent and generous nature.

And his enthusiasms were more than professional. I know, for instance, of an occasion on which the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University lunched with him and discovered that his

host could bandy Callimachus and Menander as freely as any member of his own High Table. Korda was a man in whom the electric charge of intellectual excitement never faded.

Chairing the Bard

IT is possible, without disrespect to his eminent fellow-candidates, to argue that Mr. W. H. Auden has two particular claims to the Professorship of Poetry in Oxford University. He is a poet—the finest, some still think, of the last twenty-five years—and he is an unusually inspiring teacher.

The Professor's duties are, of course, hardly more than nominal—three lectures a year, to be exact—but there is no doubt that, like the retiring Professor, Mr. Cecil Day Lewis, he would give his students a glimpse, at first hand, into the inner workings of poetry.

The prime mover in the opposition to Mr. Auden is, I believe, Mr. John Sparrow. Readers with long memories may remember that in 1934 Mr. Sparrow wrote of Mr. Auden's "The Orators" that it was "a work in which no single intelligible purpose is to be dis-

cerned—a jumble of images and jottings. . . ."

In the almost ideological contest which impends between Mr. Auden and the candidate of Mr. Sparrow, and Dr. Bowra, the urbane Sir Harold Nicolson, it is possible that the other nominee, Mr. G. Wilson Knight, may be *tertius gaudens*.

Speed Skis

MEMBERS of the British and American Olympic teams have been experimenting, I hear, with a revolutionary new plastic "wax" which can increase ski-ing speeds by 50 per cent.

This new substance, polytetrafluoroethylene—or Fluon—was first tried out on skis last March by Dr. Francis Bowdren, a short, muscular Australian who is head of the Research Laboratory for the Chemistry and Physics of Surfaces at Cambridge University.

He began to ski as a student in Australia and it was then that his dominant interest in the problems of friction began.

Recently he noted that skis slide because frictional heat melts the snow, thus providing a thin, slippery film of water. From this he deduced that an ideal water-repellent surface would increase the speed of skis; and after some experiment Fluon proved the answer.

Christmas Tests

Dr. Bowden's first controlled tests produced sensational results. Now he tells me that some of his friends have been using Fluonised skis during the Christmas holidays with considerable success.

At the moment the cost of Fluonisation should daunt all but the richest non-Olympic skiers. This plastic costs about £5 a pound, but one young hopeful who tried to get his skis treated was asked for £190 by the firm that he approached.

Big Diamonds

THE purchase of large gems is the ruling passion of Mr. Harry Winston's life, and now this amiable New York jeweller has capped his career by purchasing the largest diamond discovered since the end of the war as part of a £3 million transaction with one of Sir Ernest Oppenheimer's companies.

Mr. Winston became a dealer in the New York diamond market more than thirty years ago. He was then only seventeen years old, but he was soon able to amass the credit necessary for buying really big stones. His whole life has been subordinated to this search for size and quality.

Recently he read of the dis-

covery of a large diamond in Brazil. He flew at once to Rio, but arrived just after the diamond had been sent by air mail to a dealer in Amsterdam. Harry Winston flew to Holland. He bought the diamond within one hour of its arrival at the dealer's office.

These operations have been immensely profitable, for the value of large gems has risen consistently; but Harry Winston derives physical as well as financial satisfaction from his purchases. He likes to fondle his diamonds, even when his own cutters are anxious to get at them; and I expect that he will spend many happy hours staring in complete absorption at his new prize.

Transatlantic TV

AMERICAN scientists, I hear, have high hopes of starting transatlantic television in 1959. If all goes well the reception of pictures sent directly from the United States will be one of the features of the great Brussels World Fair of 1958.

It would be comparatively simple—though grossly expensive—to lay a co-axial cable along the bed of the Atlantic. The Americans, however, are planning to transmit their pictures through the atmosphere, and vast problems have still to be solved. Any discussion of ways and means soon enters the realm of science fiction, with talk of rays being bunched off artificial earth-satellites.

For their part the Belgians are still discussing plans for constructing the world's tallest skyscraper—a 2,000-foot television city, which has been designed by M. Gustave Magnel. The Belgians are bound to be the first to build, but even now there seems to be little chance of getting the tower into the sky by the time that the Fair opens.

The N.G.

LORD RADCLIFFE'S broadcast last Sunday on the future of the National Gallery was strikingly lucid, courageous and informed. In many respects it ran parallel with the proposals put forward, over the last year or two, by a group of collectors and historians, in suggesting that the Gallery should be allotted, over a period of ten years, a purchase grant of £1,500,000. Lord Radcliffe spoke with particular authority. He is himself a collector of experience and delicate taste. One of Picasso's finest works of 1937, "Les Femmes d'Alger," is in his collection. His house in Hampstead, and, through his long acquaintance with the Gubenkian family, he has seen at first hand how

a collection of world stature is assembled.

An Indirect Economy

At a time like the present, when a sizeable part of the world's free capital is being turned over to the purchase of works of art, Lord Radcliffe's proposals would have a negligible effect upon the total turnover of the art market. They would, on the other hand, give the National Gallery a freedom of manoeuvre which it now lacks. It would be em-



LORD RADCLIFFE

powered, in short, to get there first, in the case of an important picture, and in so doing to save the taxpayer's money. It would seem reasonable to infer that the present system of special grants is as wasteful as it is cumbersome.

The New Annigoni

ENTHUSIASTS for Mr. Pietro Annigoni's paintings will be glad to hope that he is making rapid progress with his portrait of the Duke of Edinburgh, which has been commissioned by the Fishmongers' Company and will eventually hang in their Hall, next to his portrait of the Queen.

The Duke will, I understand, be shown wearing the dark green robes of the Knights of the Thistle.

The sittings are not yet completed, but Annigoni is working in Florence on his first sketches and it is hoped that the picture may be ready in the early summer of this year.

Purgatorio

THE wittiest play now running in Paris is Audiberti's "Le Mai Court."

I have only once met M. Audiberti, whose voice is so hoarse as to suggest that he has inadvertently rubbed the back of his throat with emery-paper, but I remember that he pointed to a celebrated Dante scholar who was also at the table and said:

"If I were a *Dantiste*, I would put a plate on my front door—*Dantiste*: Consultations at All Times."